WHIRRAKEE

June 2013 Vol. 34 No. 5

Registered by Australia Post. Publication No. VBH4462

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.
Address for correspondence: PO Box 396, Bendigo 3552. Web address: www.BendigoFNC.com.au
ISSN 0812-423X e-mail address: info@bendigofnc.com.au

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Co-editor	Gemma Candy	
Whirrakee mailing coordinator	Vanessa Richardson	
Website coordinator/Webmaster	Ben Goonan	

Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $34; Family $40; Concession: Single $28.50; Family $34. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $34.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. The meeting starts with a 10 minute thing-of-the night natural history segment. The invited speaker starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper. The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 6:00pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearer listed above and the following members: Anne Bridley, Glenise Moors, Joy Clusker, Kerrie Norris, John Lindner.

Excursions are conducted regularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee*. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. Several interclub field naturalist campouts are held every year.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club has one sub-group (the Fauna Study Group) and is actively involved in local conservation issues. An **indigenous garden** has been established around the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building. Working bees are advertised on the *Whirrakee* diary page.

Fauna Study Group: Chairman: John Burtonclay, Fadersons Lane, Mandurang (5439 5710)
Secretary: Bill Holsworth, 13 Nabilla Crs., Bendigo (5443 4063)
Equipment Officer: Maurie Lewis (0407 427179)
Regular fauna excursions take place most Fridays. See page 11 for details.

Bird Observing: Club members conduct regular bird surveys. Please contact Anne Bridley 5442 6188 or Glenise Moors 5439 6254 for details. Special bird observations should be reported to Anne Bridley 5442 6188.
To propose bird observing excursions please contact Kerrie Norris 5447 8017.

Front cover photo?...see page 2

WHIRRAKEE

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Vol. 34, No. 5, June 2013

Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*), which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

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Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles. Contributions should be posted or e-mailed to the editor at least two days prior to the last Wednesday of the month. They will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although space restrictions occasionally require shortening of articles or holding them over till the following edition of *Whirrakee*.

Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

Editor's Note

Since the last Whirrakee, *Joy Clusker, Peter Ellis, Stuart Fraser (and others?) have written about the destruction (in April) of an area in preparation for a burn-off on the corner of Fletcher and Patterson Street, behind the Carpenter Street cemetery. Eltham Copper butterfly had been found there in association with the Sweet Busaria. The plants had been bulldozed by DSE as part of their planned burns preparations. Apparently the area has since been cordoned off…: but too late (see images on page 6).*

The club has had quite a few excursions lately and I can hardly keep up with the reports that tell the story for those who couldn't attend. This month we are still catching up with an April excursion, so hopefully the May event will feature next month. Please try not to get lost.

Front page photographer: Cynthia Watkins.

Grey-headed Flying Foxes in Rosalind Park, photographed during the Mammal excursion in April. The size of the local colony has increased this autumn, corresponding with flowering of eucalypts. You may have seen some concerns raised about this in the local newspaper. In a recent article in the 'Bendigo Weekly', wildlife experts have assured the public that numbers are nowhere near as large as in 2010, so there is no cause for alarm. Kerrie Norris has assembled some interesting facts about these 'flying foxes', see page 3 in this edition.

Short Notices

Central Murray Wetlands Community Advisory Committee.
North Central CMA is seeking a BFNC member to be a representative on this committee. You don't need any specific knowledge about wetlands, just an interest in providing community input into their management. You can contact Ben Goonan (0418140369) if you would like to know more.

Sunday June 16 – Fungi excursion to the Wombat Forest, Daylesford,

Leaders: Rod Orr and Joy Clusker
Departure 9.00am from the BFNC clubrooms
Golden Square Senior Citizens Hall
Old High St Golden Square
Returning between 4-5 pm

Due to the very dry autumn we can't give precise details about where we will be going, however the Babbington Rd section of the forest has been very good for fungi in the past so we will probably concentrate on this area. All going well the forest will be wood-rotting wet, cold and 'leechy'…**so come prepared**:

- wet weather gear
- warm clothing (including gloves & hat)
- boots (gaiters if you have them)
- food & hot drinks to fuel your day in a wet, cool temperate forest

This will be a car-based excursion with no long walks but the ground will be uneven and, if we're lucky, greasy, so come prepared.

For the bird watchers we **'hope'** to see Olive Whistlers, a whole rainbow of Robins and Red-browed Treecreeper. (Hope is always wonderful)

For photographers, a tripod (or the equivalent) is always useful & something waterproof (ground-sheet, large plastic bag etc.) makes kneeling or lying down much more comfortable when you need to have a closer look at any fungi we find.

Grey – headed Flying Fox in Bendigo
Pteropus poliocephalus 'Vulnerable'

by Kerrie Norris

Largest Australian bat, wingspan up to 1.3m. Wings are modified mammal forearm with, first and 2nd forefingers clawed and double layer of membrane encasing connective elastic-like tissue for blood vessels, nerves and muscle fibre. Waterproof secretion from axillar gland. Long fur brown/grey, paler head. Reddish brown mantle encircling neck. Simple ears. No tail, but interfemoral membrane for flight variation Average wt. 700g Distribution and habitat – Eastern coastal Aust. from Gladstone in Qld. to S. Gippsland. Contracting sth. Usually occurs within 200km of coast and up to 700m elevation, though most records below 200m. It is a regular seasonal visitor to Vic. with large colonies at Mallacoota, Geelong and Melbourne . It uses a wide range of habitats and is highly mobile. Distribution depends on food supply. Feeds on nectar, pollen, fruit and leaves. They are important pollinators of some Eucalypts and seed dispersers of many rainforest trees. Feeding groups are usually less than 10 animals unless a particularly rich food source occurs. Navigates by sight and finds food by smell. Does not like to fly in complete darkness. May fly up to 50km to forage and can fly up to35kmh.

Grey-headed Flying Fox forms large camps in dense vegetation in gullies near water. Camps tend to be larger in summer, animals disperse more in winter unless there is a reliable food source. Females form maternity camps in Sept.- Oct, then are joined by males as young weaned in Feb – March. Breeding males form small territories to attract females by smearing secretions from shoulder gland, on neck fur and branches. Juveniles and old males keep guard on the perimeter of the camp. They have complex communication with up to 30 different calls recorded. Breeding is highly seasonal. Gestation of 6 months with a single young born in Sept-Oct.

continued on page 8…

Maurie Lewis' mammal trap checking, Friday 19th? April (photos taken 17/12/2012 by Joy Clusker). For excursion report, see page 9.

Maurie and John – Happy in their work

Maurie with a Tuan showing off its tail.

← Two sugar gliders, they took a decent chunk out of Mauries hand

↓ This is a Tuans nest , almost full of debris

Hunting in central Bendigo Photos by Joy Clusker

Brown Goshawk attempting and succeeding in catching a Spotted Turtledove in Breen Street in the middle of April.

The Northern Bendigo Landcare Group recently celebrated it's 5th Birthday. It was a lovely evening spent with members and friends, reflecting on the many things we have achieved in our first 5 years. We are proud of the wide variety of projects, events, educational opportunities and volunteer activities we have been able to offer during this time and we acknowledge that we could never have been so successful without the combined effort of everyone who has ever been involved with our group. We would like to say a simple but heartfelt ***thankyou*** . . . . . the partnerships we have forged along the way have been the most rewarding part of the journey and the secret to our success in achieving our goal of "building community through conservation".

Correction from May *Whirrakee*:
In the photos from the Mammal Excursion 13th April bottom of page.6: "Watching sugar gliders without disturbing their sleep..." really features the one and only **Ringtail Possum** we viewed for the day.
Apologies for this mistake. You can tell that it was written by me (ed.)
Thanks, Kerrie

Below: destroyed Eltham Copper Butterfly habitat at Salomans Gully Reserve (see editorial on page 2). Photos by Joy Clusker

Grasstrees at Crosbie Nature Conservation Reserve 12th May (story and more photos next month)

We found several nests, beautifully made (Photos by Joy Clusker)

These are three pre-view images of the excursion to the above reserve. What beautiful grass trees – and growing so close to Bendigo!

Continued form page 3…

Young clings to mother for first 3-4 weeks then left in camp while she forages. Young fly at 2-3 months and are weaned at 5-6 months. Mating can occur throughout the year but males and females only fertile in March-April (thus noisy camps). Males mature at 30 months. Females generally give birth in 2nd season.

Records of Grey-headed flying fox for North Central Vic. are very sparse eg. 1920's per apiarist industry (S. Fraser). In Feb 2010, corresponding with an exceptionally wet year and mass flowering of Grey Box *(E. macrocarpa)*, these mammals established a small roost (approx. 1000) in Bendigo's Rosalind Park Fernery. However, by June their numbers had increased to peak at 33,000. The onset of the winter-flowering of Yellow Gum (*E.leucoxylon* and Red Ironbark (*E.sideroxylon*) enabled the population to maintain its level as the Grey Box flowering declined. Other eucalypt species also played a part in various places (Spotted Gum, *E. maculate* and Lemon-scented, Gum *E. citriodora* both exotic to this region), along with back yard fruit trees in flower.

The animal numbers declined very dramatically toward the end of 2010, but a core of approx. 1000 remained. In 2011, the numbers gradually rose again to about 1500 with about 500 newborn being counted during the spring. Now that the site has acquired breeding status, it is expected to become permanent (S.Burke 2012). It was considered likely that the animals moved between the two other major sites in the state - Geelong Botanic Gardens and Yarra Bend. In **March 2012, 3 male Grey-headed flying foxes within the Bendigo colony were fitted with tracking devices.** By **early May** *one* was recorded with a colony of Grey-headed flying fox in Wodonga. It was still there in July, feeding up to 30km north. However, soon after it went off air with no indication from the ground tracking device of its location. The *second* was with some Little Red Flying-fox in Numurkah, however – its collar was retrieved from under a flowering eucalypt in the Nurmurkah area on 22nd June. The *third* animal remained in Bendigo, foraging in the Kamarooka forest initially, then more south of Bendigo during winter 2012. In Sept it was with the mixed camp of Grey-headed and Little Red FF at Nurmurkah for a short period before returning to Bendigo. In Oct.it was feeding in and around the Bendigo and Golden Square areas. On 17th Jan. 2013 it went off line, but the ground tracking device was not functioning (query transmitter lost in water?). Approx. 550 animals remained in the Fernery camp over the summer 2013 (no young noted by DSE staff in spring).

Acknowledgement for local statistics 2010-13 -Shaun Burke and Braidy Childs - Bendigo DSE Wildlife Div. nb. 2013 Threatened Species Team currently monitor local Flying Fox issues

Ref: general facts L. Hall & Richard *Flying Foxes + fruit + blossom bats of Australia* 2000, UNSW

Notes and Observations from March and April

gathered by Rod Orr

Observations (March meeting)

1. Jan Orr (6.3.2013) A welcome discovery worth sharing.

Freeways are important when traveling long distances, however they (the Hume in particular) can be monotonous after a few hours. We were traveling back to Bendigo from Corryong when we felt the need to take a break from the Hume's headlong rush. The rest stops beside the road looked as busy and noisy as the freeway and not at all relaxing - then we noticed a brown sign to the Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park pointing to an exit ramp to Chiltern and Beechworth. A split second decision and we were off the freeway and quickly came to another brown sign pointing to the Honeyeater Picnic Ground and 3-4 km along a well formed forest track we came upon old diggings with a small dam and a neat well maintained picnic table nearby. The best discovery, however was that when

we got out of the car the air was full of bird song.
The area was accurately named as there were many honeyeaters coming into drink and bathe. In the time from 11:00 am - 1:30 pm we heard and saw these birds:
Fuscous Honeyeater, Brown Headed Honeyeater, White-plumed Honeyeater, Eastern Spinebill. Noisy Friarbird, Regent Honeyeater juvenile, (we confirmed this when we looked in Simpson and Day after we got home) Yellow-tufted honeyeater
Willy Wagtail, Grey Fantail, Restless Flycatcher, Spotted Pardalote, Striated Pardalote, Grey Shrike-thrush, Mistletoe Bird, Rufous Whistler, Golden Whistler, Buff-rumped Thornbill, White-throated Tree-creeper, White-throated Warbler, Rainbow Bee-eater, Red Capped Robin, Welcome Swallow,
On the dam were Little Pied Cormorant and Australian Grebe
We heard calling:
Yellow Robin, Peaceful Dove, Kookaburra, Magpie
Our cup of tea had become lunch but it was well worth the extra time to once more be amongst so many bushland birds.

2. *Jane Cleary* had her first sighting of a Wanderer Butterfly this Summer (at the Bendigo Botanic Gardens on March 13th). She also observed a pair of Grey Butcherbirds which spent several days feeding on grasshoppers.

3. *Glenise Moors* described an unknown insect - moth/butterfly/something else?; she also reported a Tuan sighting in Kangaroo Flat near bushland (near Kerrie's place); Glenise has also kept watch on a 'Tower of Mud-balls' - identified by Discovery Centre (Melb) as a Land Crustacean.

Observations (April meeting)
Ian Magee reported the possible sighting of a Powerful Owl fledgling (65 - 70 cm wingspan) hunting what seemed to be a Feathertail Glider on his kitchen window - his ID was supported by Rob Watkins.

Arboreal mammals in box-ironbark forest

Excursion report by John Lindner

Date: Friday 19 April, morning
Leader: Maurie Lewis
Assistant: John Green
Participants: Rob and Cynthia Watkins, Joy Clusker, Marie Handley, Kate Lindner, John Lindner, John Langley (WRIN), Helen Reid (WRIN), Andrea Liebert, Devi Shanty (student at BRIT)
Location: Mandurang State Forest section of Greater Bendigo National Park. Generally along Munro Road, which runs to the south of Diamond Hill Road (from where it joins Kangaroo Gully Road).This very interesting section of forest lies immediately to the east of the railway line and about 2 kilometres north-east of Sandhurst Reservoir.
Weather: Fine, cool and windy

Over a very large area, stretching from Vains Street, Golden Square, to this more southerly area, there are about 700 boxes of various designs and sizes placed in the trees to provide additional refuge for arboreal mammals. The forests are considered to have a lack of natural refuges (ie hollows in branches and trunks) due to the young age of the regrowth trees.
We inspected a small number of boxes (15) along Munro Track and its offshoots. We went to 5 separate locations, and inspected two or three boxes at each one. The box was actually detached from the tree, where it was hanging on a single, stout nail. Before detachment, the entrance hole was plugged with a wad of grass to prevent animals escaping. On the ground, the 2 nails securing the door were removed, so as to enable viewing of the interior. By noting the materials of which the nest was composed, we could easily determine which mammal had built it. If an animal was present, Maurie investigated what it was, either by feeling the body and leaving it alone thereafter, or removing it for inspection and photography. This was a bit risky and he was bitten a couple of times for his trouble (page 4 shows the 'biters').

The very significant thing about the vegetation of this woodland is that it comprises up to 6 different types of eucalypts, depending on the location. The maximum species at one location was indeed 6, but the others all had 4 species. These species are:

Grey Box	*Eucalyptus microcarpa*
Red Box	*E. polyanthemos*
Yellow Box	*E. melliodora*
Long-leaf Box	*E. goniocalyx*
Red Stringybark	*E. macrorhyncha*
Red ironbark	*E. sideroxylon*

This diversity indicates that there will be a variety of flowering times and other food resources provided by the eucalypts (eg. insects, sap). There was also quite a variety of shrubs and groundcover plants, but no attempt was made to survey these. In addition the ground has an excellent cover of fallen dead branches and leaf litter, which provide vital foraging opportunities for Tuans in particular. All the boxes were mounted on Red Ironbark trees, except for one, which was clearly a Red Ironbark/Grey Box hybrid.

The usual type of Tuan (*Phascogale tapoatafa*) nest is composed of Red Stringybark bark strips, feathers, wool or hair and a few dead leaves. The animals' distinctive black, dry scats, composed particularly of the indigestible parts of insect bodies, are deposited neatly in one corner, but also get mixed in the with the nesting material. Over time the box gradually becomes packed tighter and tighter with all the additions, so that the bottom layers are actually decomposing into fine dry humus. The usable space at the top gets smaller and smaller (see page 4). Due to the age of the material and the faecal contents, these boxes acquire a distinctive smell. For several boxes, Maurie decided to do a cleaning out operation, which involved removing the lowermost layers and leaving the top ones intact. At this time of the year the female Tuans are taking up residence in the boxes in readiness for the mating season which starts in winter.

Sugar Gliders (*Petaurus breviceps*) build a spherical nest of green eucalyptus leaves, which are cleverly moulded so that they fit into the rounded shape. In two boxes with Tuan nests, the gliders had actually built a shallow leaf nest on top. Sugar Gliders, despite being smaller than Tuans, are capable of evicting them from a hollow. At one location, an animal evacuated and scampered to the top of the tree as the box was opened, and at another, a glider looked out at us from the box before we even got to it (we did not disturb this box).

Out of 15 boxes, these were the results:

Number of boxes with Tuans	3
Number of Tuans	4
Number of boxes with 1 Tuan	2
Number of boxes with 2 Tuans	1
Number of boxes with Sugar Gliders	4
Number of Sugar Gliders	9
Number of boxes with 1 Sugar Glider	1
Number of boxes with 3 Sugar Gliders	1
Number of boxes with 4 Sugar Gliders	1
Number of boxes with unknown number (the one not investigated)	1

To find 13 animals in 7 different boxes is really quite wonderful, and surely indicates that the forest and the arboreal mammal populations are quite healthy, despite the prolonged dry period. Unfortunately much of this forest area is destined for fuel reduction burning in the near future. Our opinions about this and the impact it will have on the mammal populations registered general disgust.

I would like to particularly thank Maurie Lewis, and his many helpers like John Green, for the major effort over many years that has been put into erecting, maintaining and inspecting these boxes. That is the reason we could go out into the forest and easily locate Sugar Gliders and Tuans.

Experimental Mosaic Burning project

If anybody is interested in information and updates regarding the Box-Ironbark Experimental Mosaic Burning Project, please contact Greg Holland and ask to be put on the mailing list for the newsletter

E-mail: greg.holland@deakin.edu.au

Diary

All Club meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High St Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

Wednesday June 12 **7.30pm**
Dr Michael Weston, Senior lecturer, School of Life and Environmental Sciences, Deakin University and Mr. Kasun Ekanayake (PhD candidate) will talk about 'Little Ravens as predators and adaptations of prey'

Excursions

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Regular Fauna Excursions
Every Friday morning starting at around 9 to 9:30 the Fauna Group inspects nest boxes in the Spring Gully area. The excursions are led by Maurie Lewis, 16 Vains St. Golden Square. Phone 0407 427 179. Phone Maurie to confirm exact departure times and location. If you don't phone and go directly to Maurie's house and find nobody at the house between 9 and 9:30, then the excursion is not on.
It may be that these excursions are coming to an end. Make sure you ring Maurie if you'd like to go on such an excursion.

Family Nature Club
Somehow I did not keep up with what's on next month. Please check with Rod and Jan Orr about the June program.
Registration:
Bendigonatureclub@gmail.com or 5443-1326
Check out their 2011 and 2012 activities at http://bendigofamilynatureclub.blogspot.com/

Bendigo Native Plant Group meeting.
All interested people are welcome to come along. Meeting starts at 7:30pm on the third Tuesday of the month, Golden Square Senior Citizens Hall.
Next meeting: 18th June.

Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.
W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals. It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Sustainability and Environment.
Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433.

Mapping great change: The landscape of Victoria – 22nd March – 16 June
Post Office Gallery, 51-67 Pall Mall, Bendigo